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THE WORK OF THE ASSISTANCE PUBLIQUE FOR NURSING EDUCATION *

By M. G. MÉSUREUR

Director of the General Administration of the Assistance Publique of Paris

My friend, Dr. Bourneville, with the great experience which thirty years devoted to hospital training has given him, will tell you presently of the considerable efforts made by the city of Paris to ensure for its hospitals the help of capable and devoted *Infirmières*. I will not break into his subject, and my words will be few.

I shall only try to recall the (too often unhappy) attempts made by the hospital administrations of Paris to establish a body of lay *Infirmières*, and to remedy the difficulties of recruiting their ranks, difficulties the same to-day as they have been for the last two centuries.

In the eighteenth century a first attempt was made to form the staff at the General Hospital (*Salpêtrière*) which was recruited from young girls or widows either retired from the world or without fortune. The regulations were remarkable, and still deserve to be consulted. The staff was directed by a Superior, under the direction of a Hospital Bureau, composed chiefly of members of parliament. Under the "*officières*" were placed "*filles de service*," and another class called "*filles de malades*" worked more especially among the sick.

The difficulties of finding recruits for the Institution at first was soon succeeded by another difficulty, which became an abuse. The persons applying were too many. The profession—if at that epoch it can be called a profession—became a refuge for the unfortunate both physically and morally.

During the first half of the nineteenth century—from 1802 to 1849—no one knew how to remedy this abuse. It was once thought of replacing these paid servants by orphans from the "*Hospices*," but this project was abandoned, and in 1836 we find a new organization of the *officières*, superintendents, and servants; they were divided into eight classes, with wages gradually rising according to their class. It appears that this reform produced little effect. The complaints of the medical officers of the untrustworthiness and incapacity of these people were many, and the religious bodies who had the superintendence of the Hospital, appear to have made no attempts to instruct or to improve them in morals.

* Paper read at the opening conference of the International Council of Nurses.

In 1845 a more serious attempt was made. A resolution settled the conditions of admission of the employées, which had hitherto been left to the discretion of the superiors and directors of the Hospital. Old age premiums were also awarded, and pensions and almshouses given to those past work. Unfortunately the funds failed, and the reform resolved on was of little avail.

The law of 1849, which is still in force in the Assistance Publique of Paris, gave to a responsible director alone the management of the interests of the hospitals. This new organization had an immediate effect on the *personnel* of the hospitals. A general *repertoire* was established, where the antecedents of each worker were pigeon-holed. Her moral value, zeal, and aptitude for her work were noted. It was now possible to follow each one's work, and by degrees to establish a general purification.

Nevertheless, the evils so frequently demonstrated still persisted; this staff, without professional education, without special aptitude, manifested still the same faults—insubordination, instability, immorality. The necessity for reorganization was put before the Vigilance Committee with reference to the budget of 1861, and fresh regulations were enforced which control the recruiting and salary, the general organization of the *surveillantes*, *sous-surveillantes*, *suppléantes* (sisters, staff nurses, probationers), nurses, and night nurses, etc. It also organized the system of premiums, rewards of merit, and prizes, a system now nearly at an end on account of the higher salaries given.

The classifications adopted in 1861 were modified, even complicated, during the following twenty years by a series of reforms which had for their object the improvement of the status of the lay staff. The Municipal Council of Paris, after having repaired the disasters of the war of 1870, took in hand the reorganization of the whole municipal service. The Assistance Publique was the object of its most active work. A group of Progressives, chief among whom was Doctor Bourneville, understood that the real reform needed was in instruction and education, and moral tone, and the first "Schools of *Infirmières*" were founded in 1878 at Salpêtrière and at Bicêtre, and later at La Pitié and Lariboisière.

The question of professional training of *Infirmières* was thus first raised in Paris, and gradually universally. The public institutions, like the private ones, understand its importance and its necessity. This Congress itself is a most brilliant proof of this feeling.

The Assistance Publique of Paris, since the year 1880 has (although insufficient since expenditure is limited), established for the last twenty-

five years a nucleus of *élite* superintendents and *Infirmières*, whom you will appreciate if you visit our hospitals. It has continued to work for the betterment of the status of the staff, the recruiting of which grows more and more difficult, and though more difficult, is not always any the better. A recent regulation, dating from 1903, raised the scale of all wages, limited the working days to twelve hours, meals included, gave holidays of twenty-one to twenty-five days a year, gratuitous medical attendance, payment of wages before and after accouchements, and for men during military service. Workers attacked with tuberculosis may receive a salary for nearly three years, and we have for our *Infirmières* a convalescent home and a sanatorium; lastly, an honorable refuge is assured to all.

At the present moment we are improving the diets and sleeping accommodation by the suppression of dormitories and by indemnifying those who are lodging outside the hospital. The moral dignity of the staff is safeguarded and encouraged by the presence of its delegates on a council of discipline, and by the gift of honorable rewards by the republican government for devotion to the sick, medals for work in epidemics, and the medal of honor of the *Assistance Publique*. To-day all our efforts are directed to a better recruiting of the female nursing staff; we have instituted a preliminary course at the *Salpêtrière*, and we are at last going to open our school for nurses; in fact we have understood that technical training and professional education, must be given to young girls and young women before expecting them to become practical nurses.

We must, during the first two years of residence, which we shall impose on them, test their vocation, subject them to severe discipline, and teach them the indefatigable devotion which the care of the sick requires. It is on the threshold of this school, which you will visit on Thursday, that I give this historical summary. I have the firm conviction that our school carries within it the germ of the great revolution from which must develop the beautiful profession of the French *Infirmière*.



ENLARGEMENT OF THE BELLEVUE NURSES' CLUB

THE Bellevue Nurses' Club has been enlarged, and in addition to the club room has two floors occupied as bedrooms. The rooms have been beautifully furnished through the kindness of the president of the board of managers of the training school.